DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 687 IR 015 493

AUTHOR Storey, Dee
TITLE Which Award Books Would You Buy: Caldecott/Newbery or State Award Books?
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Literature; Elementary Education; Learning Resources Centers; *Librarian Attitudes; *Library Collection Development; *Library Material Selection; Picture Books; Reading Materials
IDENTIFIERS *Caldecott Award; *Newbery Award

ABSTRACT

Library media specialists, 55 from each of 5 states which have organized child-choice state award programs--Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Texas--were surveyed to ascertain their position on the question of whether library media specialists should purchase Caldecott/Newbery or state award books. The survey consisted of two questions pertaining to Caldecott books and two questions pertaining to Newbery books, which were all in relation to state award books, as well as a question on projected buying habits and a query on a comparison of books at state and national levels. The results suggest that those surveyed would purchase Caldecott/Newbery books in varying degrees, although the high percentage of survey respondents indicated some hesitancy in relying on Caldecott or Newbery books as the primary award books for purchase. It is also observed that a book's popularity is an important selection factor. A discussion of the implications of these findings concludes the report. (6 references) (MAB)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

SCOPE OF INTEREST NOTICE

The ERIC Facility has assigned this document for processing to: IR

In our judgment, this document is also of interest to the Clearinghouses noted to the right. Indexing should reflect their special points of view. CS

ED345687

# WHICH AWARD BOOKS WOULD YOU BUY:

# CALDECOTT/NEWBERY OR STATE AWARD BOOKS?

Submitted by:

Dee Storey
Associate Professor
Teacher Education

Saginaw Valley State University
University Center, MI 48710

(517) 790-5625

IR015493

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Dee Storey

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

WHICH AWARD BOOKS WOULD YOU BUY:

CALDECOTT/NEWBERY OR STATE AWARD BOOKS?

In the past two decades several states have organized child-choice state book award programs. Proponents of such programs believe they will foster a bond of identity with other readers in the state because the children are all part of the same program. Others note the programs are important because youngsters feel their opinions count and they have an actual say in the selection of a winner. Supporters also believe that state book award titles are more on age/grade level in terms of reading ability and interest than Caldecott or Newbery winners. Carter and Harris (1981) ascertained that "school librarians generally try to maintain a balance in their collections between books of high quality and those with popular appeal. Children rarely read the former without some exposure to the latter" (Carter, Harris, p. 57). While these attitudes are held to be positive by some, they are fuel to controversy for other professionals.

Detractors of child-choice state book award programs feel youngsters are incapable of judging books in terms of literary and artistic quality. Some critics spurn nominees and winners of state book award programs because the titles are frequently viewed as "light" reading, the lists do not include some of the best books, and the programs are reduced to popularity contests (Kaye, 1984). Gerhardt (1985) noted that "if every aspect of establishing and maintaining an influential (there should be no other sort) literary award were thoroughly examined, new ones would not be popping up all over the landscape and surely some would be abandoned" (Gerhardt, p. 74).

THE PROBLEM

In response to the dual controversy, the debate has left librarians/media specialists and teachers/reading specialists in a quandary: should they purchase national award books that are

of excellent quality but have a reputation for low readership and lack of popularity or should they buy state award titles that are frequently read but are not necessarily considered to have a high level of literary or artistic merit?

## THE POPULATION

In order to gauge opinions related to the aforementioned problem, librarians/media specialists from five states (Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Texas) were surveyed to ascertain their positions on the issues. The professionals, 55 from each state, who responded were selected at random from schools in the different state award programs. (There was a 20% return rate on the questionnaires.)

Summary of the Population

| State Book Award | First year award given | Grades participating | Average years respondent has participated | Population range for schools in survey |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colorado Children's Book Award | 1976 | Elementary grades | 5 | 42-2,200 |
| Kansas William Allen White Award | 1953 | 4-8 | 11 | 108-1,000 |
| Nebraska Golden Sower | 1981 | K-3<br>4-6 | 3 | 4-520 |
| South Carolina Children's Book Award | 1976 | 4-6 | 6 | 184-1,262 |
| Texas Bluebonnet | 1981 | 3-6 | 4 | 261-1,129 |

THE SURVEY

In part, the survey consisted of two questions pertaining to Caldecott books and two questions pertaining to Newbery books--all in relation to state award books. The survey also included a question regarding projected buying habits and a query related to a comparison of books at state and national levels.

1. **If I only had money to buy 1 Caldecott winner or 1 state book award winner (both cost the same), I would buy _____ because _____.**

Response to Question #1

| Projected book buying habits | Colorado | Kansas | Nebraska | South Carolina | Texas |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Caldecott | 33 | 53 | 25 | 45 | 56 |
| State | 30 | 20 | 25 | 27 | -- |
| Depends | 24 | 14 | 11 | 24 | 11 |
| Both | 2 | -- | -- | -- | 24 |
| Not valid question | 2 | 2 | -- | 2 | -- |
| Did not respond to question | 9 | 11 | 38 | 2 | 9 |
| 2% = 1 response | | | N = 55 per state | | |
| Responses presented as percentages<br>Percentages rounded to nearest whole number | | | | | |

Hypothetically, these professionals in five states would favor purchase of the Caldecott over the state book award, particularly in Kansas and Texas. On the average, participants in all five programs felt the Caldecott award winner would be more appropriate to purchase instead of the state award winner. It should be noted that in four of the states, there is no program for a picture book contest such as the one run in Nebraska so one might assume the book buying pattern

would be different in terms of the librarians opting to buy the Caldecott book.

In theory, the would-be Caldecott buyers would do so because the Caldecott books:

1. have more status
2. are sought out for years
3. have an award that is longer running
4. are nationally the best
5. have outstanding illustrations
6. are not as difficult to read
7. are for a younger audience
8. are picture books, not novels
9. are judged by professionals, not children

Those who favored the Caldecott books over the state book award books noted that the PTA already buys the state book award winners so there would be money available for the Caldecott books and the school only needed to buy one Caldecott book but needed several books (the list of nominees) to participate every year in the state program. One Nebraska respondent indicated that there was NLA (Nebraska Library Association) and ALA (American Library Association) pressure to buy Caldecott books in terms of accreditation recommendations. One participant from Colorado commented "that if I participated in the WAW [William Allen White] program, I would most likely have the winner already so I would buy the Caldecott book." Several librarians in all five states felt an obligation to buy the Caldecott winners to keep the collection up-to-date. Overall, Caldecott books were also selected because there was a Caldecott unit in certain grades, activity books call for the use of Caldecott books, and Caldecott books are used in a library skills class.

In the four states where there is not a lower elementary program, those who would

theoretically buy the state book award books instead of the Caldecott winner would do so because:

1. readers are too old for picture books
2. circulation would be greater because the books would have more appeal
3. with limited budgets, it is best to buy the books that make readers feel part of the program.

Theoretically, those in Nebraska who would order the K-3 Golden Sower books instead of a Caldecott winner would do so because they:

1. are enjoyed more (broader appeal)
2. have more appeal to children in grades K-3
3. are selected by children
4. are read while Caldecott books sit on the shelf
5. are part of the Nebraska program.

Those respondents in the five programs who were undecided about whether or not to buy a state award book or a Caldecott winner felt that selection/purchase would depend upon content, interest, each books' own merit--not the merit of the award--and what tradition dictates. One participant from South Carolina noted that they would select the "least serious [book because] our job is to encourage children to read not to drive them away with morbid or serious fiction."

Those professionals who determined the question was not clear because it was difficult/ impossible to judge a picture book in relation to a novel. One South Carolina participant mentioned that they would buy both books because "I'd find the money somewhere. Here you are pitting art against story. The two are just not comparable."

2. **Compared to the Caldecott Winner/Honor books, the State Award Winners _____.**

The responses to this open-ended question were answered in a markedly different way by participants from Colorado, Kansas, South Carolina and Texas in comparison to Nebraskans. Because there is no picture book division for the four states, the vast majority noted that there was definitely no comparison between the Caldecott books versus the nominees selected for the state awards. Although there is nc way to truly compare the Caldecott books with novel-length nominees, it is significant that the professionals would divide their buying dollars between purchasing the two types of books. While in theory, tradition would dictate that they would buy the Caldecott book because the books are so different, this does not clearly appear to be the case, except perhaps in Kansas and Texas, perhaps.

When comparing K-3 Nebraska Golden Sower books to Caldecott books, Nebraskans noted that the state books:

1. are more popular with children
2. are just as good as Caldecotts
3. have better stories than Caldecott books
4. are not judged strictly on literary merit
5. are unbalanced in terms of quality
6. include Caldecott honor books as Golden Sower nominees

3. **If I only had money to buy 1 Newbery Winner or 1 State Book Award Winner (both cost the same), I would buy _____ because _____.**

Response to Question #3

| Projected book buying habits | Colorado | Kansas | Nebraska | South Carolina | Texas |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Newbery | 30 | 27 | 18 | 24 | 24 |
| State | 44 | 54 | 33 | 54 | 60 |
| Depends | 14 | 9 | 18 | 18 | 9 |
| Both | -- | -- | -- | -- | -- |
| Not valid question | 2 | -- | -- | 2 | -- |
| Did not respond to question | 9 | 9 | 31 | 2 | 7 |
| 2% = 1 response N = 55 per state | | | | | |
| responses presented as percentages | | | | | |

In theory, the librarians/media specialists in the survey opted for purchasing a state book award winner over a Newbery title. The remaining participants divided their responses between the purchase of a Newbery book and qualifying their buying pattern.

The majority of professionals buying a state book award over a Newbery would do so because:

1. the state book will be read more often than Newbery books
2. the program gives children a sense of identity with other readers in the state
3. the program gives children a chance to voice their opinion and have it count
4. the state book is more popular than a Newbery
5. the state book is chosen and voted on by children rather than adults
6. the state book is more appropriate for the age/grade interests of elementary students
7. the state book is easier to read

In relation to the Newbery winners, those participants who would buy the state winners would do so because Newberys "don't draw," Newberys "gather dust," and the Newberys are too difficult to read. One Nebraskan wrote "with Golden Sower books there is almost a guarantee that the books will be liked and read--which is the real test of a good book." A librarian from Kansas commented "literary quality does the child no good if the child does not find the book appealing enough to read. WAW [William Allen White Award Books] reflect the needs of children. Newbery winners reflect the literary merit without necessarily meeting needs." A media specialist from Colorado stated "that the CCBA [Colorado Children's Book Award] are not ivory tower like the Newbery books are." One South Carolina participant quipped, "were the people who choose Newberys ever kids?"

The minority of professionals who would buy a Newbery would do so because:

1. it is a national award with a national reputation
2. it is selected on the basis of literary quality
3. it makes a lasting contribution
4. "I feel an obligation to develop the Newbery collection."
5. it will get read because of the award
6. of the selection committee
7. teachers put the Newberys on reading lists as MUST reads
8. there is a timelessness about the story

Budget was definitely an influential factor for those who would purchase a Newbery over a state award title. One Nebraskan commented that they would purchase the Newbery winner because the PTA already purchased all the Golden Sower books so money would be available for the Newbery title. Participants from the five states indicated that in order to maintain a

Newbery collection, they only had to buy 1 book a year, while to participate in a state program from 10 to 20 books had to be purchased.

Fewer respondents in all states who would have reservations about buying one type of award book over. This appears to be primarily because the Newberys are perceived to be too difficult for elementary school age children to read. Other participants cited reader appeal, subject interest, literary quality, and book length as additional considerations that could weigh the scales one way or another. One South Carolina librarian surmised that "Newberys can sometimes pick 'duds'." A Kansas media specialist noted that they alternated buying Newbery books and state book award books in order to get a balanced collection/representation. In frustration, a Nebraskan librarian lamented, "I hope I never have to make that choice." Quite forcefully, a Texan noted that having to choose a Newbery over a state book award "is a silly question. If you don't have the money for both then you need to improve the budget."

4. **Compared to Newbery Winner/Honor books, the state award winners _____.**

Responses made by the professionals surveyed repeatedly stated that the state book award books:

1. appeal more to children and are more popular with children
2. are more at grade level and easier to read
3. are comparable in quality
4. are not as high in quality as a Newbery
5. are children's choices
6. are more relevant to children and their problems
7. overlap with many Newbery honor books

Other responses indicated that state book award books are not as serious, not lasting literature, are lighter reading and as good, but not as well thought of as the national award

books. Participants noted that Newbery books are more appropriate at the junior high level in terms of reading ability and interest level. One Kansas librarian indicated "If I did not have this award [William Allen White] I would pirate from another state to help in read alouds." Some commented that Newberys are better for silent reading while the state book award winners are good for read-alouds. Rather than having to make such a decision a Colorado librarian commented that "I bought the Colorado Book Award nominees and Newbery winners and Caldecott winners for our library last fall. I was satisfied with them. Being new in my job, I feel these books gave me a good base to begin as far as ordering books for the library."

SUMMARY

Although tradition would dictate that library/media center personnel should purchase Caldecott and/or Newbery books, in theory, those surveyed in Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Texas would do so in varying degrees. The high percentage of librarians/media specialists in this survey who would purchase state book awards first indicate some hesitancy in relying on Caldecott or Newbery books as the primary award books for reading material for elementary school age youngsters.

A number of selection factors were considered by the professionals participating in this survey. They recognized the heritage/history of the award, the buying customs and the high opinion held by adults in regard to the Caldecott and Newbery award books. The media specialists/librarians placed serious consideration upon literary merit versus the popularity of the books they would purchase at either the state or national level. Other important factors that were considered included reading level, the reader's interest in a book, and the positive merits of a state book award. Thus, popularity, as shown through survey responses, could dictate the selection of one book award over another.

IMPLICATIONS

Professionals have long debated the dual issues regarding literary quality versus popularity. Although Caldecott and Newbery books are highly regarded, they are not noted for being frequently read by elementary age youngsters. Purves and Monson (1984) noted that these national winners were more in line for "high brow" or "middle brow" audience and often fall into the "ought" to read category. They cautioned, however, that "it would be a mistake to redesign the award. Quite the contrary, awards for merit should be made and criteria for merit should not be confused with popularity" (Purves, Monson, 34).

In contrast, child-choice state book award programs are often questioned as lacking in terms of literary quality by being reduced to mere popularity contests. For instance, one critic commented that "another prize to Judy Blume or Nancy Drew is the equivalent of feeding strawberries to pigs" (Gerhardt, 74). For example, in the past one of Blume's books, Superfudge did very well in state programs across the country. Some of the states where Superfudge won a child-choice book award include the Nebraska Golden Sower Award, the Colorado Children's Book Award, the Nene Award (Hawaii), the Ohio Buckeye Children's Book Award, the Sue Hefley Book Award (Louisiana), the Texas Blue Bonnet Award, the Utah Children's Book Award and the Young Hoosier Award (Indiana). While a popular state award book, Superfudge was not considered Newbery material.

The librarians/media specialists surveyed for this study had varied responses regarding their views about the literary quality of the state award nominees and winners. Some participants indicated that while literary quality of all nominated titles may be uneven or unequal, there were Caldecott and Newbery honor books included on the master lists of nominees. The respondents also felt that there was a good representation of Newbery and Caldecott award winning authors

and illustrators in the state programs. Thus, in theory, there are opportunities for youngsters to explore/read quality art and literature within the state award programs.

The uneven nature of master lists in state award programs in terms of popularity vs. quality books is to be found in state programs not surveyed. The 1986 list of nominees for the Arizona Young Reader's Award included the mass appeal/commercially produced cartoon characters in The Berenstein Bears and the Messy Room along with the quality, highly recognized and prized Dear Mr. Henshaw (Cleary), Dr. DeSoto (Steig), and Dicey's Song (Voigt). The 1985-1986 Massachusetts Children's Book Award list of nominees included the popular titles Bob Fulton's Terrific Time Machine (Beatty) and Thirteen Ways to Sink a Sub (Gilson) along with the more complex stories and messages found in Dragonwings (Yep), The Westing Game (Raskin), Jacob Have I Loved (Paterson), and Up a Road Slowly (Hunt).

While the guidelines for the South Carolina and Nebraska book awards exclude Newbery Award winners from being placed in state competition, Newbery honor books may be nominated. However such a guideline could be fuel for the argument that the "best" books or the nationally recognized books are being ignored. Kaye (1984), one analyst of child-choice book award programs, noted that "state honors have been presented to such illustrious recipients as Betsy Byars, S.E. Hinton, E.L. Konigsburg, Beverly Cleary, and Mildred Taylor, to name a few. But interesting to note that Virginia Hamilton, one of the most distinguished contemporary writers, who has won just about every major children's book award, has yet to receive a readers' choice medal" (Kaye, 78-79).

## CONCLUSION

Although there is some controversy surrounding child-choice state book award programs, many will agree with Jordan (1979) that the increase in the number of awards "is indicative of the library profession's growing interest in children's literature" (Jordan, 79). With almost half of the

states in the United States operating a child-choice book award program, the process has come a long way since 1952 when the grandparent of all such book award programs, the William Allen White Children's Book Award of Kansas, was founded.

Because there is a development of such programs and because those surveyed for this study would, in theory, have a tendency to consider purchasing a state book award title over a Caldecott or Newbery winner, more research is needed that will generate additional data regarding the perceived/actual literary quality of nominated books and winners of child-choice state book award programs. It is also pertinent to study how such programs could be instrumental in helping youngsters understand the rudiments of artistic and literary merit. Thus, it would be helpful to ascertain the importance of the child-choice state book award programs in the field of children's literature beyond the popularity aspect. Such an approach would enable professionals in the field to come to terms with success of state programs and to encourage the same enthusiasm for Caldecott and Newbery books.

## REFERENCES

Bogan, Mary E. "The William Allen White Children's Book Award Program: A Successful State Program." Top of the News, 36 (Fall 1979), p. 87-95.

Carter, Betty and Harris, Karen. "The Children and the Critics: How do their book elections compare." School Library Media Quarterly, 10 (Fall 1981), pp. 54-58.

Gerhardt, Lillian. "On Book Awards: An Editorial." School Library Journal, 31 (March, 1985), p. 74.

Kaye, Marilyn. "State Awards: A Mixed Blessing." Publishers Weekly, 225 (February 24, 1984), p. 78-79.

Jordan, Helen. "State Awards for Children's Books." Top of the News, 36 (Fall 1979), pp. 79-89.

Purves, Alan C. and Monson, Dianne L. Experiencing Children's Literature. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1984.